

Woman and the Social Problem

By MAY WOOD SIMONS



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OR

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WOMAN AND THE SOCIAL PROBLEM.

The socialist movement of to-day means not only a transformation in industry but as well in all those things having their roots in economic conditions,—art, education, ethics and politics. It means not alone a revolution in the position of the laboring man but a complete change for woman, economically, socially, intellectually and morally. The vital influence of socialism upon woman's condition and the influence in turn that she may exercise on the socialist movement have been subjects receiving only a secondary attention thus far.

Since the present social problem is a political one and since woman has no power in politics it has been presumed that her influence is too small to need reckoning with.

This is a serious neglect of the truth on the part of the socialist workers and means that a force in society that might be utilized to good

purpose may, from lack of proper consideration, become a difficult body to deal with, or before we are aware, be led over to the side of our opposition.

Woman constitutes in society a conservative reactionary body and having little initiative can therefore be better used by those opposed to revolutionary changes. So well is this fact recognized that it has become a rule of interpretation in studies of comparative sociology, that if in any society, since the introduction of private property, and the consequent degradation of woman, any custom is found to prevail among women which is not common to the whole of society, it is taken as positive proof that the custom was at one time universal, but is now being or has been superseded by a more modern process.

An illustration of this fact to-day is seen in the persistence of a great number of industries such as baking, washing, sewing, etc., in the home where they are done in a much more primitive and wasteful manner than existing inventions would permit them to be done elsewhere. This conservatism, as it exists to-day, is but the result of a long series of conditions

that have worked together to make woman physically weak, mentally narrow, politically powerless.

In no other country has capitalism utilized so extensively the economic power of women as in America. In no other country has she to so great numbers entered trade, manufacturing industries, clerkships and professions. To a certain extent she is filling industry at the expense of men, especially in manufacturing and mechanical industries and in trade and transportation. She is to-day not alone a factor in industry that must be reckoned among other industrial forces, but at the same time she exerts a powerful influence on society through the home. To neglect this large and powerful body merely because it has no vote means the loss of what could be used for the most effective propaganda work for socialism. It means further that when socialism is once realized we shall have a vast part of the population still in a backward stage. This will hinder the realization of the best art and literature and science. The future society would find itself unable to produce the best family life; and this inferiority of woman would bring the degenera-

tion of the race. Thus looked at from a broader view the inclusion of woman in the socialist program and propaganda means far more than the advance of woman alone, but the advancement of the whole race as well. Any system of society that would secure the advancement of humanity must stand for the social equality of all its members, and not give over the training of its young to those either socially or mentally inferior.

Many have contended that the work of propaganda among women requires essentially different methods than those used among workingmen. So it was said shortly ago that the work among agrarian populations must be carried on differently than for the town proletariat. This has been proven erroneous, and the same principles are found to apply in both cases.

So with woman,—it is necessary to point out her economic condition, the effects of capitalistic industry upon her and the changes that socialism would make in her position.

HER ECONOMIC CONDITION.

To understand fully the economic state of woman to-day we must go back in history and

even into pre-historic times and trace briefly the changes through which she has passed. It is to woman in the state of savagery that we must look to find the beginnings of all industry. She first gathered the bark and branches and made a shelter for herself and offspring, thus being the first of the architects and builders. She sewed together the skins of animals killed in the hunt or wove the animal and vegetable fibers and clothed her family. With clay she shaped the first rude bowls, laying the foundation of our present great pottery making. Even the desire to beautify these articles of use seems to have originated with her, and the early wares of the Mexicans and Peruvians are still standards of artistic beauty in their field. She loosed the soil with a clam shell or a pointed stick, planted the grain, and thus became the earliest of the agriculturists.

In this stage of society, woman, strong physically, journeyed with the men on their trips and provided food and clothing for herself and children. As the human race advanced into barbarism she became less the companion of man, but still procured much of her own food. She stood at one time at the head of the matri-

archal family and from her her children took their names and through her reckoned their descent. With later barbarism life grew more settled. Herds and flocks were kept. These were tended by the men and gradually they also took over to themselves the agriculture.

These new conditions resulted in woman finding more of her material support in man. Her work became now almost wholly confined to the home, and thus savagery and barbarism gave birth to and slowly developed her economic dependence. Civilization brought this to full growth.

With the introduction of private property the headship of the family was transferred from the mother to the father. This marked the first great economic and social change for woman. It meant that she now became a secluded being, entirely dependent on man for subsistence, and since her life in the open air was gone, she was no longer his physical equal. She ceased to be actively engaged in industry, and child-bearing was henceforth her chief occupation. The opinion, therefore, began to prevail that this was her sole function to perform in society.

Morgan in his "Ancient Society" says of the Greek woman: "Abundant evidence appears in the Homeric poems that woman had few rights men were bound to respect." The virtuous women were doomed to a life of absolute seclusion. Turning next to the Roman family he says: "The condition of woman was more favorable, but her subordination the same."

Lecky in his "History of European Morals" points out that the Roman matron had at one time gained political equality, but this was soon lost through economic dependence. Women of the patrician class at this time knew nothing of useful toil, the care of their children even being almost wholly undertaken by slaves. With the latter Roman Empire, there being no middle class, we see woman occupying one of two positions, either an appendage to a degraded manhood, economically dependent on him, or a slave dependent on a master.

Through the years of the Middle Ages history refers only incidentally to woman. This was the time when her secluded life continued for long periods, made her the narrow, inferior being she is to-day.

The year 1760 marks the beginning of a revo-

lution of greater importance to mankind in general than was ever opened by the victories of any king or conqueror. To woman this change was of supreme importance. It was with the opening of the industrial revolution brought about by the introduction of steam power that her pure economic value became utilized.

Under the old domestic system each little cottage was a factory in which the master workman and his apprentices using their own tools wove the cloth and manufactured shoes. In this work woman assisted only in the minor processes, such as dyeing.

For man the industrial revolution did not produce a complete change. Toward the close of this period these home factories had begun to produce for a wider market of exchange. For woman, who had produced only for consumption in the home, the change was revolutionary. She stepped at once from domestic seclusion into the industrial world as a producer for commercial exchange.

Heretofore the clumsy tools had been too heavy for her to use and lack of physical strength had thus barred her from competi-

extensively in the labor market. The new machines with their power of steam required only a guiding, and this could be furnished quite as well by women as by men. Thus the labor power of a woman under the new system equaled that of many men working after the old methods.

The present century has in this way changed for a vast number of women economic dependence from husband or father to employer and made her problem more identical with that of the laboring man.

We are able to see something of the present numerical industrial strength of women in the fact that from government reports it is found that the proportion of women employed in all occupations has risen in relation to the whole number from 14.68 percent in 1870 to 17.22 percent in 1890, the number of men having decreased from 85 percent to 82 percent. In the different occupations her numbers have increased in agriculture, mining, fishing, professional services, trade, mechanical and manufacturing industries and have decreased only in domestic and personal service.

It is seen that to-day in the United States there is scarce an industry, from the heavy farm work of the South or the canning establishments of the West, to the factories of New England, that has not been recruited from among women until now near 4,000,000, not counting the thousands of wives employed in home work, are actively engaged in industry.

But it is not the number of women employed in industry that gives us an idea of their actual industrial position. It is necessary to examine their wages and the amount of organization existing among them.

Capitalism that finds a source of strength in the great body of unemployed men who compete with each other in the labor market has reached out to the women to yet further increase this struggle, and has found in them an extremely valuable economic factor from the fact that they can be compelled to accept a lower minimum wage than man.

The minimum wages of all labor being determined by the subsistence point, that is, the smallest amount on which in any given social stage, a man will live and perpetuate his kind, it is taken for granted by the employer that

this must be higher for man than for woman. Man's wages must include the support of wife and child. Woman, whether true or not, is looked upon as having no dependents on her work, and from her known ability to live more cheaply than man is marked as the lowest of the laborers—the "downmost man."

However, an instance of the manner in which capitalism uses the working women against the working men and vice versa is afforded by the railroad employes. Women working in the offices have invariably been paid lower wages than the men who preceded them. Now the R. R. employers are discharging the women and filling their places with men working at the same, or slightly higher, wages than the women received. Shortly we shall look to see the women coming back at a still lower wage and being again displaced until the limit of existence is reached.

Statistics show that in 781 instances in which men and women work at the same occupation, performing their work with the same degree of efficiency, men receive higher wages in 595, or 76 percent of the instances; women greater pay in 129, or 16 percent, while in 57 cases, or 7

percent, they receive the same pay for the same work. Woman's average wage in the United States is about \$5 per week, while many receive but \$1 or \$1.50. This is not a living wage, and many women are forced to choose between existence and a life of prostitution.

Next, the lack of organization, or the inclination for organization among women industrially employed, is at once apparent as a source of weakness. She is not a good Trade Unionist. Various reasons are offered for this: her extreme individualism, prejudice and unwillingness to tell her wages. It must be noted, however, that few women enter industry expecting to remain in it permanently. Most think to eventually enter a home. This explains partly the lack of interest in Unions. But first it must be remembered that the whole training of women hitherto has been such that economic movements, Trade Unions, or politics have not entered her range of vision. Her environment has been wholly domestic and she still sees with a shortened eye. This is, therefore, one of the obstacles that socialism will meet in its work among women. To many it is much like bringing to them a new science, the very terms of which are foreign.

Thus far we have looked only at woman in industry. As an industrial worker her problem and its solution is the same as that of the working man. There is no difference in the way in which capitalism exploits men and women. In the economic fight it has been the one maintaining life on the barest necessities, who had at the same time little power of resistance, who has been pushed soonest to the wall, whether man or woman. In industry, before the machine, in the view of capitalism, men and women are looked upon merely as producers, as human attachments to the piles of steel and iron they guide; hired by the piece, without regard to sex.

The same laws of competition, oversupply, etc., hold with the laborer whether man or woman. As pointed out by John A. Hobson, "It is not difference of sex which is the chief factor in determining the industrial position of woman. Machinery knows neither sex nor age, but chooses the labor embodied in man, woman or child which is the cheapest in relation to the degree of its efficiency."

A large portion of the women, however, are not actively engaged in industry. They are the

wives of laboring men and must look to them for their livelihood. This makes them none the less dependents, economically and in a double sense, since they are dependents of wage slaves.

But capitalism in thousands of cases has not left these women in the home to care for the children. While the father looks for work the mother is forced into the labor market. Thus we find in many New England towns the father caring for the house and small children while the mother and older children become the bread winners.

Until recently the working women have been entitled to be called the "working girls." The majority began work at 15 years and the average of all was less than 23. At present thirteen out of every 100 women in the labor world are women with families.

SOME EFFECTS OF CAPITALISM.

The entire economic situation stands in the relation of cause to the conditions found in the homes and health of women. Modern industry appears as a gigantic Moloch into which are fed the lives and health of the laboring class. One need not go back to the horrors of the

early factory days in England. Present society has horrors of its own. The foul "sweat shop," the crowded factory, the cheap laundry, the box making establishment, the tobacco trade, and the shops all to-day make a profit from underpaid female labor. Long hours, bad sanitary conditions, the "speeding up" of machinery are a strain under which the laboring class is fast deteriorating physically. Of the vast number of working women in the United States, it is found, according to the report of the commissioner of labor, that one out of every three are living in houses that are classed as "very poor," while one out of every ten are working in shops designated as "neglected and unhealthful."

The reports of labor on "Working Women in Large Cities" show that out of every 100 women interviewed who entered work in good health, eleven at the time of the investigation were in bad health. Making all due allowance for other causes, much of this is traceable to overwork in small, ill-ventilated rooms, especially among women who take work to their homes. All this, however, does not represent the true condition. It does not take into account the great number that every year are compelled to drop out of the

industrial ranks through complete loss of health. This affecting the children born to these women means that the next generation will have less of strength and vitality.

This is the point of first importance to socialism. The future proletarian forces are in this way being gradually weakened and losing their power for intelligent revolt.

One has but to live in the slum of a modern city like Chicago or London to see how hopeless is the work of Socialist Propaganda among a slum proletariat. And these are far ahead of the next generation for a large part are country born and of still fairly strong physique, while their children are weak and pallid.

The socialists of other countries have recognized the danger of this physical degeneration to the laboring class movement. Knowing that a spiritless, indifferent proletariat is most to be dreaded, they have used their political power whenever they have come into control of cities, to carry out plans for feeding the school children.

A further proof of this fact that the laboring class is becoming physically less robust is seen in the constant lowering year after year by the

European powers of their standards of measurements for soldiers. These, coming mostly from the laboring population, can no longer in sufficient numbers come up to the former standards.

On the home and family life even the most superficial observer must have noted that the present capitalistic system exerts a baneful effect.

First as to marriage. The supposition exists that marriages to-day are founded on the mutual regard of two individuals. In fact, however, they are principally made for economic reasons. The girl toiling in the factory or shop thinks she sees in marriage an escape from her slavery.

With this for a reason and with comparatively little acquaintance, it is not remarkable that when economic troubles arise the man and wife are driven apart. In Chicago to-day the divorce courts dissolve one-fifth as many marriages as are made.

Thus has capitalism dug a pit at the beginning of the home by bringing two people to live together for no other reason on the part of woman frequently than that she wishes to obtain support. To the socialist this seems but

legalized prostitution. It is likewise for support that the prostitute nightly sells herself. Affection and respect enter frequently no more into the one than into the other.

After having begun the family on this unstable foundation capitalism adds yet other things that all result in destroying family life. The man is frequently forced to stand to one side and see his wife driven into the factory, until in the East we have our "she villages" and on the other hand in the mining regions our "stag towns."

In the crowded districts of our great cities the home is turned into a "sweat shop." The father, mother, with the neighbor and the mere babies work from daylight until far into the night for a starvation wage.

Thus after building the family on an economic basis and destroying it through industrial conditions, capitalism goes yet further and says that for thousands no homes shall exist at all.

The young man earning a few dollars a week, with little hope of ever getting more, knows he cannot on that amount support himself and a family. To him family life is forbidden, and society reaps the whirlwind of illegal sexual

relations. A careful view of society must convince one that never, even among savages, did promiscuous relations of the sexes exist more than in our civilization of to-day.

All of the older nations have for years maintained large standing armies, where great numbers of men in the prime of manhood are brought together in barrack life away from their homes. The evils resulting from this are too apparent. Capitalism reaching full growth among us to-day demands such an army in the United States, and sends back our young men unfit to become either husbands or fathers.

But capitalism comes in yet other ways to destroy home life. It takes the father away from the home in the morning before the children are awake; he returns at night when they are again in bed. He never knows his own children. It is a horrible farce to call the existence of the average laborer family life.

On none to-day do the sufferings arising from the small, overcrowded quarters that capitalism has forced its wage-earners to live in fall so heavily as upon the women. Confined continuously in one or two small rooms, that serve for kitchen, bed-room, laundry, dining and sick

room, little wonder that the mother is ill and fretful and the work half done.

There is no opportunity either before or after marriage for the woman of the laboring class to obtain an education. She enters the factory or shop before she has finished the grammar school in order that she may help to support the family. She has time to read neither book nor newspaper after marriage, the care and work for the family extending far into the night. If she fails to understand quickly the principles of socialism is it not because our industrial system has well nigh crushed out the power of thought?

CHANGES SOCIALISM WOULD BRING.

It is to socialism alone that the home life must look for its rescue and purification.

By assuring to every member of society the opportunity to work under conditions healthful and pleasant it would remove the evil of marriages formed for economic purposes only and put it upon its true basis of mutual affection and respect. It would give some time for acquaintance before marriage and thus secure adaptability of disposition.

A great amount of the drudgery now con-

nected with the home would be done away with. The domestic service is still in the Dark Ages and all the discoveries of science have done little for the work of the home.

The laundry work, the cooking when put in the hands of scientifically trained cooks, which would greatly increase the general good health, and the sewing could all be done far better in co-operative establishments. This in no way implies that each housewife may not if she so desire still bake, cook and scrub for herself, but there would be few who would fail to see the advantages of the co-operative method.

It would secure to every individual the opportunity for education and to every mother a chance to spend a few hours of the day in educative work and social gatherings, sending her back to her child strong physically and mentally to care for and train it.

Since she would perform services for society either in bearing and rearing citizens or working in the improved and beautiful shop or factory, or in producing works of art, she would no longer be an economic dependent upon man.

Woman's economic equality, however, is not imaginable without political freedom. Socialism

will mean the complete political equality of woman.

Many advocates of woman's suffrage have but seen in part. They look only for a sex emancipation and fail to perceive that the present working man has a vote, but that his condition is not that which the well being of man demands, because thus far he has not used his vote for the interests of his class. So woman with political power would be equally as oppressed unless aware of the fact that her vote must be used to bring about an industrial revolution, that would likewise give her economic freedom.

Socialism alone recognizes the full significance of equal suffrage for men and women. It sees that a large body in society, politically powerless and politically ignorant, who yet exercise a wide influence, will in time become a dangerous factor.

This movement for equal suffrage meets its opponents in the capitalist class that would restrict the right of the ballot as far as possible, that disfranchises the negro, talks of property and educational qualifications, and sees a menace in extending the vote to women.

Women recognizing the extent to which, because of this lack of political power, they are bound and their consequent less ability to effectively aid the socialist movement, will use every opportunity to gain for themselves the ballot.

THE SOCIAL PROBLEM.

It remains now to examine the problem that society is facing to-day, its solution, and its relation to woman.

History has recorded the movements that freed the slave from his master, the serf from the land, and the struggles of the bourgeoisie with the nobility for political equality.

The social movement that is going on at present is a proletarian movement; that is to say, it is the effort of the laboring class to bring into being a form of society founded in the interests of that class and at the same time of society as a whole.

Looking at society we see it composed of two classes, a ruling class whose continuance depends solely on the stability of the present industrial system, and the strength of which arises from its monopolization of the means necessary for human well being.

On the other hand, the laborers owning none of these great instruments of production—machines, factories, mines, etc.—are in complete dependence on the possessors of these for the privilege to work, and hence the means to live.

These two, employers and employed, are opposite in their interests, and no relation can exist between them that will ever mean justice and equality of opportunity to the exploited class.

This movement is international and has everywhere followed close upon the steps of capitalism. Japan, but a few years old in capitalistic industry, having not yet destroyed all the old "domestic workers," is already struggling with its labor problem, while the latest American colonial possessions have thus soon felt the weight of capitalistic rule.

This present class movement has come to be consciously conducted. J. S. Cairnes has said that "A time arrives in the progress of social development when societies of men become conscious of a corporate existence, and when the improvement of the conditions of this existence becomes for them an object of conscious and deliberate effort."

Such a time has been reached in the laboring class, and they are class-consciously seeking to direct society in its industrial evolution.

The laborers believe their movement to be in accord with the development of society and the social stage to which it leads to be the natural outgrowth of the present.

Following the course of social progress from the early part of the 18th century, the mercantile system is found still prevailing in the dealings of nations. Along with this were to be seen the small hand manufacturers jealously guarding their particular trade. In economic history this is known as the "domestic system."

The close of the century marks the beginning of the great inventions, the rise of the factories and a change of policy to that of *laissez faire*. Side by side with this came the passing of the small masters into wage earners and the removal of the tools from the users to the owners of factories.

With increasing growth and concentration of industry the wage earners grew to such proportions that before the first half of the present century had passed, Karl Marx, having foreseen already much of the trend of social development, was calling the laboring men to unite.

To the last quarter of this century has been

reserved the final feature in the growth of the present industrial order. Corporation, trust and monopoly mark the latest phase of concentrated capital.

Accompanying this is the great body of workers shut out from the instruments of production, or using them only with the consent of those who have become their owners, and securing for their labor but a part of what they produce.

"The remainder," Lester F. Ward says, "finds its way into the hands of a comparatively few, usually non-producing individuals whom the usages and laws of all countries permit to claim that they own the very sources of all wealth and the right to allow or forbid its production."

Working men have at last recognized that so long as the privilege to obtain access to the means to work lies entirely in the hands of a class to whose interest it is to exploit the worker, nothing but a complete change of the system can bring the liberation of the proletariat.

Furthermore, they realize that it must be through their own ballot that this shall be accomplished. They see that the next stage of society will mean the abolition of private property in the means of production and its transfer to the hands of the users.

The agent in the transformation will be the working man himself. Concerning this Karl Marx wrote: "The emancipation of the working class must be achieved by the working class itself and, therefore, involves a class struggle which, on the side of the workers, is not for class privileges and monopolies, but for equal rights and duties and the abolition of all class rule."

WOMAN'S PART IN THE SOCIALIST MOVEMENT.

Having thus stated the social question, the working woman will see that to her this movement is of vital interest.

This is essentially an economic movement. We have seen to what extent woman has become an economic factor, how that equally with man she is exploited by the ruling class, and that in no way does she as a wage earner differ from the working man.

In but one place is there being an intelligent effort made to secure equal rights for women and men. That is in the socialist movement. This movement stands for a condition in which classes on an economic basis cannot exist. It does not demand especial privileges for the laborer—only equal opportunity for all and that all shall be required to work for what they re-

ceive. As said by Liebknecht, to-day, "Riches are the portion of the idle, poverty the reward of the worker."

Woman has an active part in this proletarian movement. She is still unlearned in social matters, has little conception of the present step in industrial evolution and has failed to take her part in the guiding of its development.

This lack of active part in the social development is the result partially of a psychological condition among women that has arisen from her economic position.

Biology shows that the parent mother stood originally at the head of the race as bearing and rearing the young. She was not inferior either mentally or in function. Her confined life during ages has constituted the cause of her present inferiority. An organ unused tends to degenerate. Woman's intellect has been little used. On the other side, she has had much to exercise her feelings and has thus become almost entirely a creature of emotion.

Her ideas have been confined to the home, family or relatives. She has scarce ever been broad enough to reach beyond into the neighborhood, never into the greater social world or to unborn generations.

Many of our working women far behind the body of working men have not a glimmer that a social question exists. This movement em-

phasizes the preparation of the workers to take an intelligent part in the co-operative commonwealth. The measure of the advance of civilization or society lies not in the culture or education of a class or sex, or in the number or completeness of material inventions, but in the equality with which these things are distributed and within the reach of all. The claim sometimes heard that equalization of woman with man politically and economically would be detrimental to her performing the function of mother in the race and is unnecessary for the advance of society, can no longer be considered by the fair minded or intelligent.

This, however, must be no sex movement alone. The economic equality of woman can be accomplished only through the economic liberation of the working class.

Already the laboring men, conscious of their interests, are organizing themselves in the socialist movement.

They have behind them the experience of years spent in political struggles and trade unions.

Shall we to whom this movement means more than to any other body in society to-day remain inactive?

No new organization should be formed. The socialist party to which men and women are admitted on an equality already exists.

The time is ripe for the laboring women to unite with the laboring men in this struggle for economic freedom.

STUDY SOCIALISM

Every day people write us asking "What books must I read in order to understand Socialism?" To meet this demand we have assembled our Beginners' Combination. Don't imagine that you know all about Socialism because you have heard a Socialist speaker and have read a book or two. Socialism is no high-brow science, but it rests on certain fundamental principles which must be thoroughly grasped. These books are not only educative but of absorbing interest. We suggest that you read them in about the order named:

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